

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-27

NEW YORK TIMES  
6 JANUARY 1983

## ESSAY

# The Straight Story

By William Safire

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5 — Two spy stories — hidden for more than a generation — surfaced last week, each knifing to the heart of the questions "What is treason? What is patriotism?"

The House of Representatives made public 1947 secret testimony on the legislative history of the Central Intelligence Agency. Allen Dulles, who had been our spymaster in Europe during World War II and later headed the C.I.A., revealed that throughout the war "I was in direct touch with Canaris."

Admiral Wilhelm Canaris was the head of the Abwehr, Germany's military intelligence organization. "They furnished information to me," testified Dulles, "... about the German development of the guided missiles, and some of the first clues that led to the bombing of Peenemunde." He added, "The top five men in the German intelligence service were all executed as traitors."

Asked if that judgment was reasonable, Mr. Dulles replied: "They were traitors in the German sense..." Ten percent of the Abwehr were anti-Nazi because "they became disgusted with Hitler's tactics."

Thus, because the German officer worked actively against his country's barbarous government, Admiral Canaris was hanged by the Gestapo and branded "traitor" even by the American who dealt with him.

Switch now to our side, and to the forthcoming autobiography of Michael Straight.

Mr. Straight was given every advantage that American money and high society could provide. His mother was a multimillionaire, his father a respected artist. After an education at Cambridge, in England, the handsome and personable young man took tea with Mrs. Roosevelt and wound up in the State Department and as a minor speechwriter in F.D.R.'s

White House. He dabbled in journalism as an editor of The New Republic, which his liberal parents had founded.

He served honorably in World War II training to be a bomber pilot; after the war, he joined the most brow-furrowing committees, wrote a book denouncing McCarthyism and swam easily in the cultural waters. The momentum he built on the Kennedy Arts Council earned him an appointment during the Nixon years as deputy chairman of the National Endowment on the Arts. An exemplary public life.

His clandestine life began in England when he was recruited by the Cambridge don and Soviet agent, Anthony Blunt. Mr. Straight was sent home to the U.S. to become a high-level "mole." While in F.D.R.'s White House, he admits to having given five political analyses to his Soviet control officer, which he insists drew on no secret information. (How delicious it must have been for a Red under the bed to deride Joe McCarthy for looking for Reds under the bed.)

His greatest contribution to the Soviet spy system came in 1951, when he ran into another of Mr. Blunt's recruits, Guy Burgess, in Washington. The thought crossed Mr. Straight's mind that Mr. Burgess was running an espionage operation out of the British Embassy which had probably cost thousands of American lives in the Korean War. Did he turn his old friend in, and thereby compromise the worldwide web of Soviet agents? Hardly; Mr. Straight relates with great pride how he told the top Soviet agent to stop spying and go home. Mr. Burgess promptly picked up his partner and lover, Donald Maclean, and fled to Moscow in the most famous spy defection of our time.

Over a decade later, when Mr. Straight wanted a place in the cultural whirl of John Kennedy's Washington, he told his friend Arthur Schlesinger Jr. that the F.B.I. ought to be made aware of a few events in the Straight past. His belated confession — made not after a sudden insight that loyalty to country comes before loyalty to college chums, but strictly to clear his career path — led to the end of the spying of Anthony Blunt in London. The F.B.I. paid off by treating its well-connected witness the way the British Old Boy Network treats its high-born embarrassments: by giving Mr. Straight a clearance for future government jobs and decades of guaranteed silence.

Can Michael Straight fairly be called a traitor? Not really, because no purpose or passion guided his double life. Evidently that word is not currently applied to White House aides who do political analysis for the Kremlin, or to citizens who fail to report what they know to be espionage until the spy is safely gone.

In that light, let us reconsider Allen Dulles's too-quick assessment of Wilhelm Canaris.

Here was a man who placed his honor as a German officer, his duty to his fatherland and his responsibility as a human being ahead of his loyalty to a mad leader. With courage and clarity of purpose, Admiral Canaris deliberately dared to commit the crime of high treason — and needs no self-justifying memoir to be remembered not as a traitor but as a patriot.